

PATENT APPLICATION

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COMBINATION CUP SLEEVE AND PLUG ASSEMBLY

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to accessories for beverage containers and, more specifically, to a Combination Cup Sleeve and Plug Assembly.

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2. Description of Related Art

Boutique coffee shops (and large chain coffee shops) have grown exponentially in popularity. As with many growing industries, the growth of the coffee shop industry has resulted in the introduction of many new products related to the core product (i.e. coffee). One particularly popular product that has experienced significant evolutionary steps as a result of the popularity of the coffee shop industry is that of the disposable cup. Figure 1 depicts a design for a disposable cup that is now used widely in this industry.

A common design for the disposable beverage container 10 used by coffee shops today has a container 10 made from cardboard or other paper-related product. For safety to prevent spilling, there is a disposable lid 12 that snaps onto a lip formed at the upper rim of the container 10. The lid 12 is defined by an upper lid rim 14 and a lower lid rim 16; the lower rim 16 has a groove formed in it that cooperates with the lip formed in the rim of the container 10. A dispensing aperture 18 is disposed on the top of the upper lid rim 14.

This aperture 18 is typically rectangular in shape with rounded corners (at least for one or two particularly large chain coffee shop company's product). Because the coffee products provided to the consumer in these containers 10 is typically very hot, even to the touch, a very useful accessory was developed – the insulating sleeve 20.

5 While these sleeves 20 can come in a variety of different materials and styles, one predominant style is depicted in Figure 1. This insulating sleeve 20 is formed from a rectangular strip of corrugated cardboard. Near each end 24A and 24B of the strip of cardboard a partial cut 22A and 22B has been made in the strip – one cut 22A leading from the bottom edge of the strip and reaching just past the centerline of the strip, and one cut 22B
10 leading from the top edge of the strip and reaching just past the centerline of the strip. To form the strip into a sleeve 20, the sales person simply slides the two partial cuts 22 into one another such that they interlock to form a closed sleeve 20. The sleeve 20 is then slipped over the bottom of the beverage container 10 so that it protects the customer's hand from being burned by the hot liquid in the cup.

15 These disposable insulating sleeves 20 are very effective at their functional purpose, but they are lacking in at least two areas – aesthetic appeal and spill prevention. While the user's hand is well protected against burns from the hot cup 10, there is nothing to prevent the user from spilling coffee out of the aperture 18 (which typically does not have a cover). What is needed, then is a device or assembly that not only protects the user's hand
20 against burns from heat transfer through the wall of the container 10, but also provides a way to prevent spilling out through the aperture 18. It would also be very beneficial if this device or assembly was designed and made from materials that made it more aesthetically pleasing

than the prior sleeves 20. Also, most sleeves are designed from low-cost materials (either paper or cardboard) to meet a disposability objective. It would be beneficial if there were a sleeve that incorporated a higher quality material in order to improve aesthetics, provide reusability, as well as potentially providing superior thermal insulating qualities.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In light of the aforementioned problems associated with the prior devices and assemblies, it is an object of the present invention to provide a Combination Cup Sleeve and Plug Assembly. The combination should include an insulating sleeve for disposable beverage
5 containers, as well as a detachable plug for the dispensing aperture formed in the lid of the container and a lanyard interconnecting the two. The sleeve should be provided in a variety of durable, aesthetically pleasing, non-disposable forms. The plug should be configured to be insertible into the dispensing aperture of the cup and should be made either from semi-precious or low cost materials. The plug should further have a surface for displaying
10 trademarks and/or identifying indicia thereon. The sleeve should further include a holder for the plug when the plug is not in use for plugging the dispensing aperture. The lanyard should be a detachable member (from the plug) made from cord, chain or other material that will interconnect the plug and the sleeve.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The objects and features of the present invention, which are believed to be novel, are set forth with particularity in the appended claims. The present invention, both as to its organization and manner of operation, together with further objects and advantages, may best be understood by reference to the following description, taken in connection with the accompanying drawings, of which:

Figure 1 is an exploded perspective view of a conventional insulating sleeve and disposable cup assembly;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the sleeve and plug assembly of the present invention;

Figures 3A and 3B are top and bottom views, respectively, with the sleeve of the assembly of Figure 2;

Figures 4A – 4D are side, back, top and bottom views of the plug of the assembly of Figure 2;

Figure 5 is a perspective view of the assembly of Figures 2 – 4 attached to a conventional disposable cup; and

Figure 6 is a perspective view of the assembly of Figures 2 – 5 having the plug stowed in the pocket.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The following description is provided to enable any person skilled in the art to make and use the invention and sets forth the best modes contemplated by the inventor of carrying out his invention. Various modifications, however, will remain readily apparent to those skilled in the art, since the generic principles of the present invention have been defined herein specifically to provide a Combination Cup Sleeve and Plug Assembly.

The present invention can best be understood by initial consideration of Figure 2. Figure 2 is a perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the sleeve and plug assembly 30 of the present invention. The assembly 30 is composed of three major components: The insulating sleeve 32, the plug 34, and the lanyard 36 detachably interconnecting the two. The sleeve 32 forms a cup chamber 40 to accept the conventional beverage container (see Figure 1) therein. One very unique aspect of this sleeve 32 over the prior art, however, is the plug pocket 38 for holding the plug 34 therein when it is not being used to plug the dispensing aperture (see Figure 1). If we now turn to Figures 3A and 3B, we can discuss these components in more detail.

Figures 3A and 3B are top and bottom views, respectively, with the sleeve 32 of the assembly of Figure 2. The sleeve 32 is typically formed with an outer layer 46 and an inner layer 44 connected to one another, such as by the stitching shown in Figure 2. There may also be an intermediate layer sandwiched between these inner and outer layers 44 and 46 for additional insulation. At least the outer layer 46 is preferably made from a durable,

flexible, washable and aesthetically pleasing material. One favored material is burlap, used to simulate the look and feel of a bag of coffee beans. In other forms, the material could be velvet or fine leather, or other fine quality materials. The eyelet 48A is shown here as a small loop extending from one portion of the sleeve 32 where the lanyard (see Figure 2) can be
5 attached. The eyelet 48A may also be a loop or pair of holes formed in the sleeve 32, or from other conventional attachment devices.

Extending from the front side of the sleeve 32 is an additional storage sleeve or pocket, referred to herein as the plug pocket 38. The plug pocket 38 is generally made from a flap of the same material as the outer layer 46 attached to the outside of the outer layer
10 46 in such a way as to form a receptacle for the plug (see Figure 2). In this version, the plug pocket has an upper opening 50 and a lower opening 54; the pocket 38 is designed to cooperate with the plug (see Figure 2) so that the plug (see Figure 2) can be slipped therein through the upper pocket opening 50. If we now turn to Figures 4A – 4D, we can examine another element of this novel assembly.

15 Figures 4A – 4D are side, back, top and bottom views of the plug 34 of the assembly of Figure 2. The body 56 of the plug 34 is preferably made from a durable, possibly valuable material, such as silver or gold (or plated in these metals); of course plastic and other materials are also to be provided. The body 56 is formed having smooth chamfered edges 70 on all four vertical edges (vertical in Figures 4A and 4B), as well as all horizontal surfaces
20 (i.e. where the vertical surfaces meet the head 58 and tip 60). The plug 34 is tapered in from the head 58 to the tip 60 so that it will seat into the dispensing aperture (see Figure 1) until a seal is formed between the walls of the plug 34 and the edges of the aperture (see Figure 1).

As such, the front face 64 and back face 62 are both tapered in from top to bottom, and the first and second side faces 66A and 66B are also tapered in from top to bottom. In other versions, the plug 34 may be provided in different cross-sectional shapes (i.e. circular, square) to accommodate differently shaped dispensing apertures. Furthermore, the plug 34 may be
5 partially or completely coated with rubberized or plastic material in order to provide a more liquid-tight seal between the dispensing aperture (see Figure 1) and the plug 34.

In order to provide added aesthetic appeal, one or more indicia may be engraved or otherwise displayed or etched to the body 56 of the plug 34; in this embodiment, the indicia 68 is inscribed on the back face 62 (opposite the eyelet 48B). One exemplary
10 indicia is that of the coffee shop company's logo or name.

The eyelet 48B is preferably formed as an integral part of the body 56 in order to insure the security of its attachment to the lanyard 36, however, this does not preclude possible manufacturing cost considerations dictating other approaches. The lanyard 36 is shown here as a jewelry-grade chain that interconnects the plug 34 with the sleeve (see Figure
15 2). One or both ends of the lanyard 36 may be provided with a clasp, hook or other attachment means that permits the lanyard 36 to be detached from the plug 34 and/or sleeve (see Figure 2). In other versions, the lanyard 36 may be made from wire, cord or other durable, yet flexible materials that are conventional for tethering two devices together. Figure
5 shows how the whole assembly functions with the plug (see Figure 2) inserted into the
20 dispensing aperture (see Figure 1).

Figure 5 is a perspective view of the assembly 30 of Figures 2 – 4 attached to a conventional disposable cup 10. When the user wishes to plug the aperture 18, such as

when the container 10 has been filled with hot liquid, he or she need simply to remove the plug 34 from its convenient storage location in the plug pocket 38, and then insert the tip into the aperture 18, allowing the plug 34 to drop down until a snug fit exists between the aperture 18 and the plug 34. As shown, the user's hand is thermally protected from the hot sides of the
5 container 10 by the insulating qualities of the sleeve 32, as well as being protected from spillage of hot liquid through the aperture 18. Of course, the sleeve 32 also provides an improved grip for the user to more securely grasp the beverage container 10. Figure 6 depicts the assembly 30 with the plug 34 being stored in the plug pocket 38.

Those skilled in the art will appreciate that various adaptations and
10 modifications of the just-described preferred embodiment can be configured without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention. Therefore, it is to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced other than as specifically described herein.